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John Tunney, Kennedy's Friend In Muskie's Corner

By JACQUES LESLIE

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A FEW days after John Tunney was elected to the United States Senate, he was walking through the Capitol building when he ran into a senior Senator from one of the Southern states. The Senator, who was with a group of his constituents, introduced his colleague-to-be from California: "Gentlemen, this man has just been elected to the United States Senate, and I'm sure you all know his daddy, who used to be the heavyweight champion of the world. I'd like you all to meet Senator Dempsey."

The slip's implication that Tunney's

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success is based on faded memories of his father is one that many of his critics would agree with. According to their line of reasoning, Tunney is the son of a famous boxer who diverted the spotlight from his father to himself. Tall, handsome and athletic-looking, married to an attractive Dutch woman who has just launched her own rock 'n' roll singing career,* the son appears in society pages as much as in news stories; though glamorous, his critics suggest he is intellectually second-rate, as befits the son of a boxer, a "political lightweight," to wrap up the metaphor.

*Mickie Tunney has cut a rock 'n' roll record entitled, "Habit of Love."

.... Another of his possible shortcomings is expressed by Representative James Corman, a California Democrat who supported Tunney in the Senate primary and says: "If I had to pick a weakness, it's that he tends to vacillate. I think John considers it a weakness not to take a stand on things. He considers it a weakness not to consider new facts. Because of those two things, he tends to change his mind too quickly."

Tunney has changed his mind on two key issues, Vietnam (he is now a firm dove) and the SST (after first coming out against, then in favor, he finally voted against it). His change of heart on the SST in particular tends to bear out what Corman says. During his Senate campaign, Tunney said that he was opposed to the SST, then, after the election, he held aerospace hearings in Los Angeles and came out in favor of it. He says now, "I am afraid that I was somewhat confused. . . . At those hearings we had one witness after another come forward and say that the SST should be built and that it was going to be great employment for California and that the environmental problems could be resolved, and that it was economically feasible. . . . But when I got back here I realized after reading the Senatorial hearings that it was not a good program and that we should use the \$290-million elsewhere."

Tunney explains his change of heart on Vietnam this way: "When I went to Vietnam [as a Congressman] in 1965, I didn't know anything about the war. And I didn't know anything about the Vietnamese people. Before going over, I had the State Department, the C.I.A. and the military brief me on it, and I went there with what I thought was a fairly decent matrix of information upon which to build. When I got over there everything that I heard was the same as the Stateside briefings. It dovetailed and seemed to me to be representative of the truth. And I therefore came back a flaming hawk.

Fall in 1966 and began to get very concerned about it at